

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

ROGER LEE COLVIN,

Petitioner,

Case No. 1:10-cv-197

v.

Honorable Gordon J. Quist

KEN McKEE,

Respondent.

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OPINION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Promptly after the filing of a petition for habeas corpus, the Court must undertake a preliminary review of the petition to determine whether “it plainly appears from the face of the petition and any exhibits annexed to it that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court.” Rule 4, RULES GOVERNING § 2254 CASES; *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If so, the petition must be summarily dismissed. Rule 4; *see Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (district court has the duty to “screen out” petitions that lack merit on their face). A dismissal under Rule 4 includes those petitions which raise legally frivolous claims, as well as those containing factual allegations that are palpably incredible or false. *Carson v. Burke*, 178 F.3d 434, 436-37 (6th Cir. 1999). After undertaking the review required by Rule 4, the Court concludes that the petition must be dismissed because it fails to raise a meritorious federal claim.

Factual Allegations

Petitioner Roger Lee Colvin presently is incarcerated at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility. He pleaded guilty in the Kent County Circuit Court to operating a motor

vehicle while intoxicated, third offense, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 257.625. On December 18, 2008, he was sentenced to a prison term of two years and ten months to ten years.

Petitioner sought leave to appeal his conviction to both the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court, raising a single issue: whether the trial court erred in determining the amount of restitution owed by Petitioner without first conducting a restitution hearing. The state courts denied leave to appeal on July 9, 2009 and December 21, 2009, respectively. In his habeas application, Petitioner raises the identical issue raised in the state courts.

Discussion

In his habeas action, Petitioner does not contest the legality of his incarceration or the length of the prison term to which he was sentenced. Instead, he challenges only the procedure by which the order of restitution was entered.

The habeas statute provides that a federal court may entertain a habeas application by a state prisoner “only on the ground that he is in custody in violation of the Constitution or laws or treaties of the United States.” 28 U.S.C. § 2254(a). The essential purpose of the writ of habeas corpus is to free individuals from wrongful restraints upon their liberty. *Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484 (1973). Where a habeas petitioner is not claiming the right to be released from custody but is challenging the imposition of a fine or other costs, he may not bring a petition for writ of habeas corpus. *United States v. Watroba*, 56 F.3d 28, 29 (6th Cir. 1995). Liability under a restitution order is like a fine-only conviction and is not a serious restraint on liberty sufficient to warrant habeas relief. *See Barnickel v. United States*, 113 F.3d 704, 706 (7th Cir. 1997); *Tinder v. Paula*, 725 F.2d 801, 805 (1st Cir. 1984); *see also Mullins v. Birkett*, No. 2:09-cv-12515, 2010 WL 764386, at *3 (E.D. Mich. Mar. 4, 2010) (citing *Flores v. Hickman*, 533 F. Supp. 2d 1068, 1085 (C.D. Cal. 2008) (holding that imposition of a restitution order as part of a California state sentence

could not be challenged under the habeas statute because restitution did not affect the duration of habeas petitioner's state custody)). Because the appropriate relief for the alleged error would be an amendment to the court's order of restitution, not release from custody, a writ of habeas corpus would be inappropriate. *Mullins*, 2010 WL 764386, at *2 (citing *United States v. Zaragoza*, 16 F. Supp. 2d 1111, 1112 (N.D. Ind. 1998); see also *United States v. Gianelli*, 543 F.3d 1178, 1184 n.7 (9th Cir. 2008) (stating that a federal prisoner "cannot present his claim for relief from [a] restitution order as a habeas petition because he is not seeking release from custody, and because review of restitution orders is not properly brought in a habeas petition").

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, the Court will summarily dismiss Petitioner's application pursuant to Rule 4 because it fails to raise a meritorious federal claim.

Certificate of Appealability

Under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2), the Court must determine whether a certificate of appealability should be granted. A certificate should issue if Petitioner has demonstrated a "substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right." 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). This Court's dismissal of Petitioner's action under Rule 4 of the Rules Governing § 2254 Cases is a determination that the habeas action, on its face, lacks sufficient merit to warrant service. It would be highly unlikely for this Court to grant a certificate, thus indicating to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals that an issue merits review, when the Court has already determined that the action is so lacking in merit that service is not warranted. See *Love v. Butler*, 952 F.2d 10 (1st Cir. 1991) (it is "somewhat anomalous" for the court to summarily dismiss under Rule 4 and grant a certificate); *Hendricks v. Vasquez*, 908 F.2d 490 (9th Cir. 1990) (requiring reversal where court summarily dismissed under Rule 4 but granted certificate); *Dory v. Comm'r of Corr. of the State of New York*, 865 F.2d 44, 46

(2d Cir. 1989) (it was “intrinsically contradictory” to grant a certificate when habeas action does not warrant service under Rule 4); *Williams v. Kullman*, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983) (issuing certificate would be inconsistent with a summary dismissal).

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has disapproved issuance of blanket denials of a certificate of appealability. *Murphy v. Ohio*, 263 F.3d 466 (6th Cir. 2001). Rather, the district court must “engage in a reasoned assessment of each claim” to determine whether a certificate is warranted. *Id.* at 467. Each issue must be considered under the standards set forth by the Supreme Court in *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473 (2000). *Murphy*, 263 F.3d at 467. Consequently, this Court has examined each of Petitioner’s claims under the *Slack* standard. Under *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484, to warrant a grant of the certificate, “[t]he petitioner must demonstrate that reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.” *Id.* “A petitioner satisfies this standard by demonstrating that . . . jurists could conclude the issues presented are adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.” *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 327 (2003). In applying this standard, the Court may not conduct a full merits review, but must limit its examination to a threshold inquiry into the underlying merit of Petitioner’s claims. *Id.*

The Court finds that reasonable jurists could not conclude that this Court’s dismissal of Petitioner’s claims was debatable or wrong. Therefore, the Court will deny Petitioner a certificate of appealability.

An Order and Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: April 19, 2010

/s/ Gordon J. Quist
GORDON J. QUIST
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE